parasitic

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parasitic

by YourMinecraftBoyfriend

Summary

He felt…fine. Well rested. Still extremely hungry, but otherwise perfectly fine. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been without some base level of pain. Without it, he felt bright, chipper even.

Maybe the vacation was starting to work. Who knew that he just needed a few relatively stress-free days.

Hungry.

He whipped around as a deep, rumbling voice shot through his skull that seemed like it came from everywhere and nowhere at once, like he could physically hear it though it didn't trickle into his mind from his ears.

There was no one there, obviously because he didn't actually hear anything. The voice came from his own mind.

Hungry!

Notes

ty to my beautiful beta el who's h0neybeebear on here <3 this would be licherally incomprehensible without u

See the end of the work for more notes

He always enjoyed wintertime in Wolf Trap. The woods surrounding his home faded into an eerie silence that was only broken by the crunch of snow under his boots and many sets of paws. The rest of the year, the trees and underbrush were filled with the sounds of birds and rustling branches, but now he couldn't even hear the babbling of the stream as it was completely frozen over.

A sound barely cut through the silence, the soft sigh of a dying animal, a deer most likely. They didn't cry out like wolves or coyotes, but the pants were distinct. It must be nearby.

His dogs were off in a shot. Domestication couldn't stifle an opportunity hunter's instincts, but Will's words usually did. They halted with a sharp 'stay!' that all but one heeded.

Buster was always the worst at following commands.

Will sprinted through the snowy woods, following the trail of paw prints until he came upon his dog sniffing the mouth of a stag. It had a large rack of antlers and no visible injuries, despite looking relatively healthy, aside from a touch of malnourishment.

The gaunt, dark-coated animal gave one final heave and fell silent. Will watched as its eyes glazed over, losing the bright sheen of life for a natural dull.

Only because he was watching the dead animal so closely did he notice the thick red ooze of blood that crawled out of the animal's lips in an oblong gooey mass that seemed more coagulated than a trickle of blood should normally be.

Before he could snatch his dog back from the dead animal's mouth, Buster was burying his snout in the blood, lapping it up with a greedy tongue. It seemed to almost jump to his dog's lips, pulling out of the stag and snapping into him like taffy.

Will ran to the dog as Buster whimpered and took a step back. There was no blood on his jaw, like it had sunk into him.

With practiced fingers, he pried his dog's mouth open with a 'spit it out!'

The thick blood dribbled onto his hands. It was a deep red, thicker than any blood he'd ever seen, but there was no mass lodged inside Buster's mouth for him to pull out. The blood stretched from his fingertips to halfway down his forearms, coating them evenly.

As soon as he was set to release his animal and attempt to wipe his hands in the snow, the blood vanished. It disappeared into his arms like he absorbed it, leaving only cold pinkened skin in its wake.

He pulled back as quick as he could but his arms were still in that perfectly unblemished state. Buster was once again wagging his tail, trying to sniff the dead buck.

The hallucinations were getting worse. This was only one instance in a line that was getting disturbingly long- though it wasn't like blood wasn't a common feature in many of the strange images his brain showed him.

His work was slowly killing him from the inside out. This week was supposed to be a respite, a stay-at-home vacation to help him get his head on straight, and he had to fight tooth and nail just to get Jack to allow him that much, but his brain was so fucked that now, apparently, he just saw blood wherever he went. The headaches were never-ending; he could barely get up in the morning without a few shakes from his dwindling bottle of aspirin.

The trek back home was quick and angry. He didn't mean to be short with the dogs. They didn't do anything wrong, but he knew his frustration with his own broken psyche was leaking into his actions.

He winced as the door slammed behind him, hard enough that the hinge shuttered and almost cracked. He hadn't actually meant to use any force.

He hadn't been hungry on the walk, but suddenly he was starving. Cooking anything, or even just putting together a sandwich seemed like too much effort, so he just grabbed a few slices of lunch meat and shoved them into his mouth.

It helped marginally, enough to flatten the sharp peak of hunger, but he still felt that sharp pang. There weren't many options in his fridge unless he got a hankering for dog food, and he wasn't that desperate yet.

By the time night rolled around, he'd polished off a few cans of soup, the rest of his lunch meat, two different frozen dinners, a half pint of chocolate ice cream that he desperately wished was a full gallon, and a container of liquid chicken stock that he forgot to water down into broth.

As he laid down, his stomach *still* rumbled, but there was nothing left in the house that wasn't frozen or needed prep, so he just filled up a glass of whiskey and did his best to fall asleep.

Half a bottle of whiskey didn't seem to make a lick of difference, but somehow sleep still found him.

His dreams were always vivid, even when he was a little boy, but he'd never had one quite so tangible. He dreamt he was the stag he found, stumbling through the woods around Wolf Trap and *starving.*

Withered berries and young bark didn't settle him like the rest of the deer in his small herd. His teeth were sharp in his mouth, cutting into his own gums, but he was too hungry to feel the pain.

Did he feel the pain at all? His thoughts felt jumbled, filtered through the intelligence of the stag. His hunger was less a pain in his stomach but more of a full body ache.

There was no choice left; the pain became too sharp. He retreated inwards, inside his own body and found something to snack on, far more filling than berries or tree roots. He wasn’t supposed to eat this; it was a part of his body– *no, this body* – but without it he would suffer.

He'd been suffering for a while. Wintertime kept him so cold and so, *so* hungry.

This morsel wasn't the only one he took. After he sampled he couldn't get enough. It wasn't long before he took too much, the herd had moved on by then, and he couldn't keep up anymore.

His body collapsed, minutes away from death. He wasn't designed to live in the freezing temperatures, and there were no other bodies for him to live in. Winter turned a plentiful forest into a desert.

Through the trees, his savior arrived in the form of an inquisitive canine tongue. He had to stop himself from devouring the muscle on contact; it was good that he didn't, because the perfect flushed flesh of a man was offered before him only seconds later.

Sinking inside felt like home, like perfect warm safety. He knew he would not leave for a good long while.

Will didn't gasp awake. In fact he had one of the most gentle awakenings he'd experienced in months. The sun was well past the horizon, and he realized that the only reason that he'd awoken when he did was because Stella was whining to go outside.

He glanced over to his alarm clock. 9:37 am. He hadn't been able to stay asleep past 6:00 in months, usually after barely making it to bed by 2:00.

His hand instinctively reached for his aspirin when he realized that his head didn't hurt. His temples didn't throb, and the brightness outside didn't pierce his skull– which was what woke him up most mornings.

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Hungry!

Again the deep voice echoed, demanding attention. Will leaped from his bed and ran to his kitchen, but there was just as little as there had been last night. He lurched out his front door in his haste to get to his car. There was a gas station a mile down the road, and he could be there in five minutes. He didn't notice that he'd left his front door wide open and forgot to

grab anything but his wallet and car keys. He hadn't even remembered to throw on a proper pair of pants over his boxer briefs.

He also didn't notice how quickly his feet were carrying him across his front lawn, and how the snow didn't sting the bare soles of his feet, and that he'd accidentally ripped the handle off the door of his sedan.

His own thoughts were too quiet to acknowledge under the deafening slew of *hungry hungry hungry hungry.*

It was lucky that the car didn't spin out in his haste to get to the gas station. He'd put snow tires on just a week ago and was glad he did now, he felt like his stomach might consume him if he didn't eat something, *anything* soon.

He flew in with the force of a hurricane, grabbing whatever was closest: Jack Links, Doritos, Twinkies, 3 cooler sandwiches, a gallon of whole milk. When he stormed into the candy aisle, he swore he blacked out and ended up with half the chocolate they offered in his full hands. His salivary glands were making him almost drool on the tile.

The normally placid teenage cashier eyed him with a healthy dose of concern as he piled everything onto the counter. It was a miracle that he hadn't torn into anything yet. As she rang up his purchases, he swiped more candy from the impulse section and a couple pints of blessed chocolate ice cream from the cooler.

There was a rotisserie chicken rotating behind the counter– a makeshift deli.

"T-that, I want that." He jammed his finger in the direction of the poultry as it teased him with its sensuous dance.

"Um, sir, I'm not sure-" Will could see her uncertainty as she took in his half-naked, deranged self.

"No! I need it!" His hands were beginning to shake the longer the cashier hesitated, but after a few heated seconds, she relented and pulled the bird down tortuously slow. A spot of drool leaked from his panting mouth.

He missed three times trying to jam his card into the scanner. When the motion was smooth enough to process the read, it felt like he hadn't even consciously moved the limb. The steady motion certainly wasn't from him.

Before the cashier even finished bagging the mounds of junk food, he tore into the plastic chicken container, and sank his teeth into the greasy flesh.

He felt bone gnash under his teeth, but he was too far gone to back off. It shattered under his molars and he swallowed it down without another thought.

After a few more frenzied bites, he regained enough of his senses to pull back for a moment and take in the horrified face of the cashier. She looked at him with wide eyes and parted lips,

and it was only then, feeling her fear and seeing his feral self in her eyes, that he was able to wrestle control back from the hungry monster he'd turned into.

What the hell was he doing? He was barefoot, in his boxers, devouring poultry whole– his fingers and face were coated in grease and meat.

He quickly glanced away from her terrified face and snatched the bags and mangled bird from the counter and booked it to his car. It was still running, and the door was slightly askew, the handle was broken and dangling.

The cashier was surely still watching him so he pulled out as quickly as he could despite still feeling the overwhelming desire to tear into the meat right at his fingertips.

He only made it just past the bend of the road before he pulled over to the side. He was swallowing down another desperate bite before the car even stuttered to a stop.

There was something wrong with him. He knew this even as he tore off more and more chunks, swallowing down skin, fat, flesh, and bone with far too much ease.

Stress didn't do this. Stress gave him nightmares and headaches and hallucinations. It couldn't turn him into a starving, wild animal, could it? There had to be something physically wrong with him.

The entire chicken was gone in less than five minutes. He felt marginally better but his hand still reached for the Jack Links. Meat seemed to fill him more than anything else.

The package was empty.

It wasn't torn open. It was punctured through the middle, ignoring the perforation.

Did he do that in his haze? The package was definitely full when he snatched it from the shelf and his fingers weren’t made of goddamn needles.

Just another thing to worry about in his already extremely stressful morning. He only wanted to go home and try to lie down for a few hours until hopefully he was feeling more sane.

Despite the strange, hungry desperation he’d felt that morning, the rest of the day progressed in a relatively sane manner. He fed the dogs, cleaned up the mess of wrappers and packaging he’d left the night before and was able to relax enough to lightly read by his fireplace.

Of course, always with one hand shoveling junk food into his face. His hunger hadn’t receded, but it was more of a dull ache at this point.

The strangest part though, aside from the confusion as to how so much could fit inside his body without his stomach inflating just a little, was that he more or less felt *fine* . Just like when he woke up– no headaches, no hallucinations (unless he counted the incident with the Jack Links), no mental agony whatsoever.

Was this stress eating? He'd never been soothed from his mental problems by food in the past, and this seemed excessive. He was pretty sure if this was his mental break he shouldn't be having such a stark breath of clarity at the moment.

Trying to put the incident from this morning from his mind, he reclined further into his one good chair and steadily fed himself his moderately large spread of chocolate bars and relished the rare peaceful moment.

It wasn't until nearly an hour later, after he'd grabbed the last piece of chocolate that was perched on the arm of his chair, that he noticed something was amiss. He was sure that just a minute ago, the arm was devoid of any further treats, but he could very clearly see a Twix bar just past his fingertips.

His stomach was still rumbling, so he grabbed it with confused gratitude sent to his subconscious. Distractedly, he looked back down to his book and read the same paragraph three times without comprehending it once.

He looked back up. A pack of Reese's sat on the arm of the chair.

That hadn't been there a moment ago. It was supposed to still be in the plastic bag a few paces away.

Cautiously, he snatched the candy and didn't turn his attention back down to the book. The arm stayed bare. He bent his head towards his lap and flicked his eyes up every few seconds.

He only heard the tiniest crinkle of the bag in warning before, quick as a flash, a Hershey's bar sat in the vacated spot. Only out of the corner of his eye did he see a tiny streak of red, like a drop of blood shoot through the air.

He wiped his eyes with his palms and the chocolate was still there on the arm of the chair, no red streaks in sight, as if it'd been there all along. Could that have been a hallucination? He didn't feel confused or sick, but the bar was tangible, completely. If it was a hallucination then he'd been gone far longer than he expected. Was the food he'd been eating even real? Is that what was going on?

It would explain why the hunger wasn't retreating.

Right when he thought that his stress had been retreating, apparently his brain was simply gearing up for a new symptom. Great, just fucking perfect. At this rate he'd end up in a psych ward by the end of the month.

Relax, Will. You're hungry, that's all.

He whipped around again as that rumbling voice from earlier rang through his head. Of course, there was nothing there because he was still in a goddamned hallucination!

Breathe, my Will. Your cortisone levels are too high.

He plugged his hands over his ears, as if that would stop a voice originating from inside his head.

You must calm yourself. High stress levels are bad for the body.

He wasn't even sure what late stage disorder he had that he'd begun to involuntarily coach himself down from a panic attack.

Maybe he should get a brain scan. Or go punch a wall.

The latter sounded far more appealing, so he stomped out of his home to vent some of his frustration on his barn door.

Anger was the only thing keeping him from crying, and hopefully the pain would ground him in reality.

He reared his fist back as the voice rattled through him again.

Will, go back inside. Your body needs rest.

His fist flew, but never connected. A large, red bloom erupted at the point of contact, enveloping his hand in a warm, almost wet, cradle that halted the violent motion.

It pulsed and twitched as he watched it, shiny like exposed viscera. Just as suddenly as it appeared, it retreated back up his arm and into his skin.

The voice sighed, though it sounded more like a deep growl.

You shouldn't try to hurt yourself, not when I just finished fixing you.

Why wasn't he waking up? The sweaty confusion he was used to feeling was still missing, but why was he stuck in this hallucination?

It felt too real. He didn't feel like any specific killer. He felt too much like himself, but he knew what he was experiencing couldn't be real.

He sank to the ground, his back towards the barn door, and buried his face in his knees. This wasn't how this week was supposed to go. It was supposed to stop all the terrifying gaps in his consciousness, not create new ones.

Before the cold snow could seep into his clothing, he felt a warm, slick sensation settle across his back and underneath his legs.

So quickly he almost felt dizzy, calm rushed over him, flooding his system like a switch was flipped, and he was suddenly, pleasantly drunk.

Wetness retreated from his eyes as he sank into it. No fear was present, and though he knew logically he should be panicking, he couldn't through all the haziness.

He peeled his head from the cozy trap of his knees and saw the thin red sheen that covered him. It was warm like a heated blanket, but only as thick as a sheet of paper. The blinding reflection of bright snow glinted off it like the polished varnish of a sports car. It rippled and shuddered underneath his inquisitive fingers.

Are you feeling more calm now?

If the voice wasn't going to go away, he should at least acknowledge it.

He nodded his head slowly. The haziness made him feel slightly dizzy.

Good, Will. Do you believe you are able to walk now?

"Don't want to," he mumbled into the red sheet.

That's alright, my dear. Just let go, I'll take care of you.

The haziness was getting worse, but so was that floating drunkenness, reminiscent of when he was put under to get his wisdom teeth removed.

The last thing he remembered was standing, but not of his own will, like he was being controlled from the inside like a sock puppet.

—

Will woke up in his own bed, hours after the sun set. Unlike last time he woke, he wasn't ravenous, and his gentle rise was uninterrupted, allowing him to savor the slow stretches to bring life back into his muscles.

He didn't remember putting himself to bed. In fact he distinctly remembered passing out outside his barn with a warm red sheet protecting him from the freezing temperatures.

A coat of blood. He was sure there was some symbolism in that if he cared to search for it.

Winston was at the foot of his bed, whining and nudging his hand.

"What is it, boy?" He reached out to ruffle his ears and saw his hand flecked with more red. At first he thought it was a continuation of the hallucination, but as he moved his hand he could feel how it pulled at his skin– the unmistakable texture of dried blood.

He could smell it now and felt it elsewhere– splatters up his arms and on his neck, his lips. There was no pain in his body- he really hoped that didn't mean it came from someone else.

His bathroom mirror painted a more gruesome picture than he realized. His face was covered, the blood was in his hair, on his cheeks, he could taste it inside his mouth.

It took a few minutes to scrub away everything. His face still had a faint red stain, and he couldn't get it all out from under his nails, but he looked less like a beast now.

He probably shouldn't have done that. He should've called Jack and had forensics test where it came from as he couldn't see any obvious suspects. All his dogs were happily milling about, and there wasn't a body in the middle of his living room.

The only clues were an assortment of bloody handprints that led to his front door.

He followed them, feeling a tad like an 8-bit detective in a CDI game, until the trail came to a graphic halt at the bottom of his porch steps.

There was a doe, mauled and absolutely eviscerated.

Its gut was torn open and it seemed a bit deflated. Upon looking closer, he could see it was because all of its inner organs had been removed. The top part of its skull was lying a few feet away, and the entire brain was missing, along with its eyes.

A couple crows picked at the corpse, but it couldn't have been here more than a few hours.

God, did he do this? There's no way he could've done this much damage with only his hands, completely unaware.

The organs were nowhere in sight, his stomach was full, and his lips were still painted red. He'd have to give up his forensic degree if he ignored all the evidence present.

For the first time in many months, he wished he didn't feel so sane. If he was lucky, this was only a hallucination. Maybe he *should* get that brain scan.

No! No machines!

He almost tripped on the porch steps at the angered force of the voice.

I fixed you, there's no need to involve anyone else.

"You're not real, you're in my head! Does this look fixed to you?!" Great, now he was arguing with an imaginary voice.

If you try to go to a hospital, I will take you back home. Just like I did this morning.

He looked back down at the torn-through deer. None of his hallucinations had ever lasted this long. A cold shot of fear striked through him like a lit matchstick. "...What did you do?"

We were hungry. I fed us.

"You did this?"

Would you rather I let us starve?

"Who- *what* are you?"

Can you accept my answer? Or will you continue to write me off as a hallucination? Odd that you're so quick to disregard your own perceptions when they have not lied to you once over the last few days.

"I have to be hallucinating. There's no other explanation."

There is, but I fear you won't trust your eyes no matter what I do. Would you believe me if I said that you haven't experienced a genuine hallucination since-

Will's own memories played in a corner of his mind, as if someone was watching a film reel in the room he was in, but he wasn't paying attention.

I believe it was Thursday. You were followed by a feathered stag as you froze yourself in your front yard. That makes our meeting rather poetic.

He recalled that night. It's what had made him go to Jack the morning after and demand the next week off. Everything was so hazy, so different from the 'hallucination' he was experiencing now. He could barely move forward then, disjointed from his own limbs.

"What do you mean 'our first meeting'?"

You and your pack found my last body right as it gave out. Did you know I was near death? Suppose it's rather fitting that you were as well. We can help each other, Will, all you need to do is see and accept me.

His eyes were overtaken by an image– a memory?- of sinking inside himself, the same scene as the dream. Was it a dream? It was getting harder to believe that the voice came from him.

"How can I see you?" His voice came out small and soft, inquisitive and breakable. If there was nothing there, nothing to see when he was feeling so sane, he didn't know what he'd do.

Go inside, Will. I do not care to expose my body to this cold.

He did as the voice asked, leaving the crows to pick at the doe.

Sit down, and don't deny reality.

He moved towards his armchair with robotic legs, his dogs sniffing his hands as he passed.

"Relax, Will. Your heart rate is still elevated."

It took him a few seconds to realize that the voice wasn't coming from inside his head, but from his own chest. He watched in horror as that shiny red pool from before seeped from his sternum and coagulated into a moving, shifting mass. Tendrils sprang forth like burst arteries and formed into the rough shape of a head.

Two swirling, opaque white eyes blinked at him and a wide mouth, splitting the face in two, smiled at him with rows of long, needle-sharp predator's teeth. It parted that Glasgow smile and a tongue roughly the length of his forearm spilled out before quickly retreating to that wicked mouth.

"Hello, Will. It's lovely to finally make your acquaintance."

He threw his body backwards with a startled shout, toppling the chair and knocking his head against the ground, except his head never made contact. That same red mass encompassed his skull for a brief second, turning the hard floor as soft as a pillow.

"It's a wonder you haven't killed yourself before I arrived. You really are quite clumsy."

“What the hell are you?” he whispered in frightful confusion.

Will got that ‘movie reel that he's not watching’ feeling again, and abruptly he realized that this *thing* was searching through his memories.

“I'm a, I believe the correct term would be a symbiotic organism. I require another living body to survive. Luckily you offered yours after my previous host had succumbed to his injuries.”

The only injuries he’d seen on the stag had been the spot of blood in its mouth, which meant that whatever had killed it had to be internal.

“What injuries were those?”

“It was missing various organs and parts of organs.”

So was the doe on his front lawn.

“...Were they missing when you entered the stag?”

The shark smile grew a fraction wider.

“No, hard to find proper nutrition this time of year. I'm afraid it was simply too difficult to resist a taste.”

Will’s hand flew to the small pouch of his stomach instinctively.

“You're in no danger from me, Will, as long as you feed us properly.”

“You're not symbiotic, you're a parasite. Some sort of mutant infect-” His own mouth sealed shut, like the muscles had suddenly clenched.

“I am not a danger to you unless you invite it. We can benefit each other, a mutualistic system. I’d rather not take your body hostage. It’s been the only one I haven’t desired to destroy.”

After a few seconds, his mouth was freed. “I don’t see how I’m benefitting. You get to live here rent free and I’m, what, a little better at killing deer?”

“You’re limited by your primitive body. You were killing yourself, you know. Your brain was swelling beyond the confines of your skull. Why do you think those headaches disappeared, my dear boy?”

He was still pinned to the floor, blood was starting to rush towards his head.

“The taste of your encephalitis was sweet, a certain spice to the fever. I would’ve loved to bask in it if our body wasn’t being compromised.”

“Our body? It's *my* body!” Encephalitis would explain the symptoms he was experiencing though– headaches, hallucinations, fatigue, night sweats– all were easily attributed to a brain

infection. “How’d you get rid of it? How do I know I’m not in an infection-induced hallucination right now?”

“I ate it. It really is quite simple to consume your problems. I suggest you try it some time.”

Warily, he tried to sit up again and move back from the haunting face, but of course, it was attached to him. It followed him and seemed to grow further as more red tendrils joined its mass.

“As for who I am, my name is Hannibal. I apologize for not introducing myself at our first meeting, but it took a fair amount of time on my part to regain my strength.”

“So what? You’ve been eating my organs to recover? Why even bother to fix a brain infection if you’re just going to kill me anyway?”

“You’re not listening. I don’t wish to kill you. Your body is the most comfortable I’d ever taken residence in.”

Will drew his knees close to his chest and firmly shut his eyes, his hands pressed to his ears, attempting to block out that deep, haunting voice.

I’m still inside you, Will. There’s no need to be frightened. I promise I won’t even harm this pack you insist on surrounding yourself with.

“Go away.” He tried to pretend that he wasn’t begging.

This can be beneficial to you as well. Do you desire strength? Physical harm cannot touch you if you allow me to protect this body. Perhaps you fear injury originating from within? I can heal failing organs, destroy forgeign invaders.

“Other than yourself?”

Rude boy, I know you fear your own mind. Is that not simply another failing organ? All those cloying thoughts that only you experience. Wouldn’t it be easier if someone else could bear the burden?

“No one else can do what I do. It doesn’t bother me, I’ll manage. I don’t need you.”

There are no forts in your skull. I can see your desperation, your loneliness. Either way, with or without your complacence, I shall still inhabit your body.

“I’m not lonely, I chose to live like this.”

You know that seven canines cannot fill your lonesome void. It’s killing you, more slowly than the encephalitis, but far more surely.

“You don’t know anything about me! You’re just trying to get under my skin.”

A deep chuckle rattled through him and sent a hot coal towards his gut. *I already am, Will. I’m offering to be your companion, all you’ve ever wanted. Isn’t that right?*

“No, all I want is you gone!”

Shame, though I should’ve seen from your memories that you’ve always been quite stubborn. I’ll leave you for now, though feel free to speak to me when you’re feeling a bit more rational.

He didn’t open his eyes for almost a full minute after it- *Hannibal* finished speaking. When he finally did, the pulsing red face had fully retreated, leaving him alone on his living room floor.

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The rest of his night was quiet. No deep voices pounded through his skull, and he was left to face the startling sanity. He moved the doe carcass to the edge of the woods and left it. In two days time it would be picked clean by hawks and coyotes.

He took the time to scrub the bloody handprints from his walls and doors and by the time he was finished, it was as if he’d never blacked out and mauled an animal in the first place. Everything looked normal. He could almost pretend that the last 24 hours never happened.

Almost.

His head felt too clear for all to be as it was, and sometimes he could feel a…shifting from inside his body. It settled in his stomach, then near his sternum, then spread through his chest. He couldn’t mistake Hannibal’s physical presence for anything other than what it was, though luckily it didn’t cause him any pain.

A few times he was tempted to say something to him, tell him to unwrap himself from Will’s lungs or ask how he was able to slot between his organs without any issue, but he resisted the urge, stuck in his stubbornness.

Any searches he conducted online didn’t seem to help. No combination of ‘living infection’ or ‘talking parasite’ or ‘symbiotic organism with a face’ turned up anything that would be relatively useful, and he wasn’t about to ask Hannibal for any answers.

By the time he decided to lay himself down to sleep, he’d thoroughly exhausted his options. There didn’t seem to be any way to get rid of him, at least not at the moment, and Will was frustratingly stuck.

He knew Hannibal was screwing with his brain chemistry as he lightly drifted off to sleep, likely flooding his system with melatonin and reducing his cortisol levels, but knowing didn’t make much of a difference as sleep’s embrace still pulled him under.

His morning wasn’t plagued by blood or hunger, well not much hunger anyway. Not the desperate hunger that had racked his body yesterday that had had him running to the gas station in his underwear.

At around noon, his phone buzzed. He debated not answering Alana's call, but she'd just worry more if he didn't.

"Hello?"

"Will, it's good to hear from you. How have you been doing?"

There was no way he could tell her the truth. Hell, he didn't even know how to put the truth into words, but she deserved a sprinkle of honesty at least.

"Better. Been able to sleep, spend time with the dogs. Guess I just needed a break."

"I'm glad you stood up to Jack. He's been pushing you too hard lately."

"The work's important, I don't blame him." Jack couldn't have known about the encephalitis, apparently no one but a parasite that literally was inside his brain could notice that he was behaving outside the norm for his crazed self.

"I never said it wasn't, but you can't work if you're pushing yourself to the brink. Would you like some company? I can bring lunch."

"You don't have to." He wished she wouldn't, but by the tone of her voice, she'd press it, and he didn't have the energy to come up with an excuse as to why she shouldn't.

"I'd like to, I bought too many dog treats last week anyway."

"...Fine, but don't expect great company."

"Don't worry, Will. You never disappoint." He felt the smile in her tone as she signed off, wishing he could take comfort in it like he used to.

Alana arrived with a bright expression and a handheld cooler only twenty minutes after the end of her call. She must've already been on her way. The dogs flocked to her as Will let her inside, sniffing her hands and the mysterious container. She produced a small bag of brand name dog treats from her jacket pocket and passed them around to their hungry mouths.

"I never know how you manage all of them. I feel like I would trip over at least one a day."

"They're usually pretty well-behaved, just not when a new person smells like treats." He forced a smile that he hoped didn't look like a grimace.

She pulled him into a hug. He saw a red tendril reach out from his neck to hers and swiftly pulled away, bolting to the bathroom with a quick, "I'll be right back!"

"What the hell did you do?" he demanded to his own face in the bathroom mirror.

Are we speaking again?

“Just tell me what you were trying to do to her!”

Protecting you, as I said I would. Aren’t you curious what she thinks of you? What her intentions are? There’s more than one way I can keep you safe, Will.

“I already know what she thinks of me.” His voice petered out, but Hannibal could hear him from inside his mind, so he caught every word easily.

I’m aware of that trick of yours. Too many mirror neurons, right? You absorb the thoughts and designs of everyone around you like a sponge. I’m anxious to see it in action.

“For all I care you can go back to wherever you were hiding. Just don’t try to, to *read* her or whatever you were trying to do.”

Of course, Will. I’m sure you’ll provide a great performance with or without my interference.

He expected the symbiote to retreat back to his place in between Will’s organs, but he felt him move upwards, settling around inside his head. It felt like a hand on the back of his skull, except from the inside. He imagined his tendrils wrapped around the folds of his brain, in all the small divots and veins.

Hannibal had said he wanted to watch. Apparently he was going to watch from front row seats. Will could even feel a slight pressure, though no pain, settle behind his eyes.

And he couldn’t do a single thing about it.

Alana was tapping one heeled boot against the hardwood when he came back, anxiety pouring off her in waves.

“Sorry about that, I uh, ate some bad fish this morning.” The lame excuse sat heavy on his tongue, but she still gave him that signature gentle smile.

After a few days with nearly no human contact, having her presence in his living room was almost overwhelming. There was no fever to dull his mind either, so the onslaught of information hit him like a speeding semi.

Her makeup was freshly applied but layered, meaning she’d touched it up before coming to his home. The tip of her jacket was a slightly darker shade, wet from the snow. The subtle crinkle around her eyes still showed a small amount of concern, though she was attempting to buy his excuse so that she’d have less to worry about. As soon as he met her eye, he was lost in the information present in her iris, cornea, and pupil. The variations of sky blue trapped him until he forgot the words coming out of his mouth.

“-ill? Will, are you alright?”

“Yeah, sorry. I’m a little out of it. Didn’t get a lot of sleep last night.” Another lie, not his smartest move considering she was also a psychiatric professional.

“You’re not still hearing things, are you?”

“No, you don’t have to worry.”

“I’d still worry, even if you were doing perfectly alright. It’s what friends do.” There was some reassurance in her words, enough kindness that for a second Will forgot to avoid her eyes again.

He got stuck in the corners, the lack of yellow crust caught in the edges but a slight reddening that-

Nothing.

He blinked and they were just eyes. She was just looking at him and her words registered easily.

“Not in my experience, but I’m glad you came. This looks delicious by the way,” he said warmly without a hint of reprehension. When he was in the bathroom arguing with Hannibal, she’d warmed up a casserole in his oven. Melty cheese and potatoes smelled heavenly as she placed it on his counter. It had a certain southern homey taste that he appreciated.

“My mom’s recipe, though she wasn’t much of a cook. Easy to make though, which is nice because I’m not much of a cook either.”

He watched her face as she spoke of her mother, but the corresponding conclusions he was sure to draw and inappropriate conjectures he was sure to blurt out never came. Blissful silence settled in his head as he watched his friend fuss with the glass dish as he found his small stash of cutlery.

Their conversation was light and simple. They stuck to safe topics like the dogs, the weather, the drive over and not once did Will get lost again. It was almost unnerving that he couldn’t read her microexpressions as she spoke to him, but not enough that he tried to search for them again.

The twitch of her lip caught his eye, and he was just about to place what that meant when he caught it that time– the swift close of a thought almost formed. Like blackout curtains hastily being drawn on a miniscule corner of his mind. A skitter of tiny tendrils that he barely felt receded.

The small genuine smile that had formed in the effortless conversation slipped from his lips as he realized what was going on.

He sprang up from his dining room table and was shepherding Alana out with an excuse that he didn’t really hear, almost polite. She shuffled out with concerned confusion that he almost missed crossing her face. It worried him that he almost missed it.

The moment he was alone he spun towards the middle of the room, rounding on the organism that he couldn’t round on because it was still wrapped around his brain.

“Hannibal, come out!”

He could feel as the painless pressure in his head shifted to his shoulder, and then out of his body, floating in front of him like a strange, creepy balloon.

"You told me to go back inside."

"You were doing something to me. Don't try to deny it."

"Of course not, I would be disappointed if you did not notice." The shark smile had returned, pulling back the creature's blood red lips to reveal long, pearly white teeth.

"Well?"

"I told you that I can take control over parts of our body-"

" *My* body!"

*" **Our** body. It was simple enough to shut down some of your overactive mirror neurons. Are you not pleased, Will? Wasn't it so much easier to concentrate on being human when you didn't have to worry about all the little details you were seeing?"*

"You had no right to screw with my head like that!"

"Who else could? I can save you from your suffering, Will. I am not trying to harm you."

"I don't need any saving."

"Stubborness will take you to the grave. For so long you've kept everyone else outside your head while desperately hoping someone could penetrate your high walls. No one can. There was no possibility. You stumbled upon the one being that can give you what you desire, and you push me away. I cannot see the logic in it." As much as he could, Hannibal softened his voice, turning it soothing despite the gravel quality.

"I can't trust that's all that you want. You've stilled my words, forced me to sleep, and shut down parts of my brain. Why shouldn't I be frightened?"

"But you're not frightened. There is no potent taste of fear residing in your amygdala. You're guilty. Life doesn't come easy for you. It hits you as you lay tied to the rail. The concept that your salvation came to you, offers you company, and can rest your overworked head is too sweet to accept, so you resist. You can't resist me, Will, I was buried inside the moment we met. You don't have to justify your acceptance to anyone. There's no one here to see you as weak."

"I don't-"

"You do. I'm in your mind, coiled around your thoughts. I feel the sweet thrill in your veins. You cannot lie to me, even as you attempt to lie to yourself." He must've known when Will needed a firm hand and when he needed gentle words as he used them perfectly in turn. His argument sounded flawless, far too reasonable a solution to end Will's suffering.

He shivered. He couldn't tell if it was one of Hannibal's tendrils or a lick of pleasure that wrapped around his spine.

"...what would I be if I did accept?" His words were whispered, but he could've shouted them and it wouldn't have made a difference.

"Yourself. Why wouldn't you be? Unless you believe yourself is intrinsically tied to suffering."

"You shut off a part of my brain. Why wouldn't I be different?"

"Only temporarily, when it was hurting you. I'll not interfere with your investigations, Agent Graham, not unless you ask me to."

He had the sudden urge to reach out and touch the red shifting mass, liquid blood formed into a tangible personality.

"You can't give me everything I want. You're making promises too big for a single being." Will reached out a single finger towards him, a shifting tendril met him halfway, wrapping lightly around the digit before releasing him.

"I'm not a god. I can't whisk away your memories and a lifetime of learned self-isolation, but you can accept me as your companion. You can allow me to banish your guilt before you turn towards the bottle. I can offer respite and power in turn and all you have to do is keep me fed."

"Any other body would work just as well. You don't need mine."

"I've not only resided in vulnerable woodland creatures. This is the first body, human or animal, that did not try to reject my influence. You could not have known, but your body is symbiotic in nature. There's more room in your skull for an extra personality. That is extremely rare."

"Lucky me."

*"You **are** lucky. Let me show you, Will. My nature is not reduced to the single mindedness of consumption. The freedom of powerful limbs can show you sights you've never thought to bear witness."* Will shivered at the thought of being more than himself. How far could Hannibal's reach extend? Could he envelope his whole body in that warm, red blanket that protected him from the cold before?

"I don't want you to show me if you're just going to go out and kill more deer."

"There is an overpopulation problem, but no, it's simple enough for me to practice restraint."

He swallowed down any residual reluctance and relaxed his stiff limbs. Genuine excitement was rare in his daily emotions, and for once he didn't fight the swift course of hope that things might not go as bad as they could.

"Alright, show me."

—

The eerie silence of winter only became more pronounced the further into the long miles of woodlands he went. Blurs of trees, bushes, and streams passed him, *them,* in flashes so quick his mind couldn't keep up with what he was seeing. His legs continued on though, coated thickly in that shiny, red sheet, forming into powerful cords of muscle that propelled them as fast as a car and as precisely as a jungle cat.

Will was completely enveloped by him, safe from the whipping winds of the cold winter air as they burst through the snow covered grounds. Fast and powerful, they were a sated apex predator simply enjoying the wide range of their ability.

Hannibal couldn't do this alone. He propelled them by enhancing the structure of Will's body into something more than human.

The feeling was addictive, and he felt untouchable. The mindsets of others and the responsibilities and stressors of his work seemed so far off. He was a child suddenly, standing at the top of a forest hill, allowing gravity to propel him forward as he swiftly avoided tree roots and thorny bushes at a breakneck speed.

Humans were natural pursuit hunters, but Will thought it was a shame they weren't designed for sprinting.

He wasn't sure if it was minutes or hours when they finally came to a halt. Despite the long distance, his pulsing muscles were only slightly tired, though his hunger was a tad more noticeable.

They stopped at the frozen edge of a pond. Above them was a small cliff face with a waterfall, frozen mid flight over their head. Delicate ice crystals spidered out from the edge of the pool, and he could see tiny live fish moving beneath the nearly clear surface. Behind the waterfall, trapped in stasis, was the opening to a shallow recess, an untouched sandstone and limestone cave.

Will felt the moment that Hannibal relinquished his control over their body. He did not retract the hulking, blood red form, but Will's limbs were no longer only moving with his limp consent.

He drew one clawed hand to his face, splaying their fingers to see the solid, fluid, shifting flesh that clearly held so much strength. Together, they were at least eight feet tall, and without Hannibal's careful control, he felt large and clumsy, fearful that he'd break the delicate scene in front of him.

Do not worry about your control, Will. This is just as much your body as it is mine. Feel our strength, revel in it, know that you have as much power to tear creatures limb from limb as to caress a frozen bud without a scratch.

A young oak sapling near the pool had weathered the cold winter months. One of its branches came to a small, ice coated bud, preparing for the spring thaw. He crouched down, feeling the texture of snow but not the bite of cold under his feet and knees.

His large hand reached for it. As soon as he thought that he didn't want to damage it under his claws, they retracted. A delighted, involuntary gasp passed from their lips, deeper than his own voice.

Their touch stayed delicate, and the sapling was left with only the dusting of snow disturbed.

He took them to the mouth of the short cave, baring their claws once again to carve through the sandstone.

"This place is beautiful, Hannibal. How did you know about it?" His voice came out deep and gravelly. It was difficult to work around the long tongue in their mouth.

I spent many months in the forests around your home. That stag was far from the first host I took here. Their bodies were not compatible with my own, however, they quickly deteriorated in my presence. I was never able to give them a full form as I'm able to with you, but I was able to see a few beautiful sights before I was forced to move on to the next warm body.

"How'd you end up here in the first place? You have more consciousness than an animal, and you're obviously more compatible with human hosts, so how'd you end up out here?"

A long series of unfortunate events that I'm sure we can go over exhaustively later. It boiled down to my last human host, a man I was far from compatible with, crashing his vehicle somewhere within the backroads around this place. Luckily, the weather was more favorable at the time, and I was able to survive until a hungry coyote found his corpse.

"Were you responsible for the crash?"

Not entirely, though I wouldn't say I was irresponsible. As I said, we were quite incompatible, and I wasn't getting the nutrients I needed.

"What'd you eat? His kidney? His liver?"

His diaphragm. He suffocated. I'm afraid I wasn't quite as familiar with that aspect of human anatomy at the time. I am still relatively new to the planet after all.

"Does that mean you're only a few months old or that you're an alien?"

The latter, though I'm afraid it's not as exciting as you might imagine.

"I can't imagine how that's not exciting, but I'll take your word for it.

I have to say, Will, compared to your behavior earlier, you're taking all of this quite well.

"You're not going to eat me, right? And you like my body so you're not going to leave it either?"

Yes to both your questions.

"Then I don't see the point in panicking anymore. You obviously care what I think of you. You want us to be companions as much as I want one or you wouldn't have taken me here.

You wouldn't have allowed me to control our body. You cannot help your nature, gore-filled as it is, any more than I can help mine. We can benefit each other. You're stuck to deal with my bloated thoughts, and I won't vomit up any meal you force down. Just don't make me watch as you tear into the deer, alright?"

Will was in control of their face, but he could still feel Hannibal's grin.

I believe that arrangement will suffice.

"No eating my dogs though, no matter how hungry you are."

I wouldn't dream of it.

Despite Hannibal's body stretched over his own, he still felt a purring warmth settle in his core. A jolt was sent directly into his brain as Hannibal's surprised and delighted satisfaction pulsed through him. He felt gratitude, burgeoning affection, and a fair amount of possessive devotion that seemed out of place for the few days they spent together.

It should've unnerved him, but it never could. Hannibal wouldn't, *couldn't* leave him. He'd never again be forced to bear the burden of his thoughts alone, and all he had to do was hunt a few deer out of season. Hannibal was right. At first, it seemed too sweet a prospect, too hard to accept it was offered to him.

For now, he'd welcome the hopeful sensation. It had been far too long since he'd faced a future with hope.

End Notes

this is part 1, hopefully ill have part 2 posted by the end of the month <3

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